CHAPTER 2

Case-Study Research

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> What *can* be done with thousands of children but count them? In mass, children—and the challenges they present—are faceless, nameless, and overwhelming. But these massive numbers of children are not isolated individuals; they're social participants included, or so we hope, in particular classrooms and schools, in particular institutions and communities.
>
> —DYSON (1995, p. 51)

Dyson (1995) stated the foregoing in her response to the importance of case-study research. She continued her conversation by saying that case studies do not offer information about causality regarding teaching practices and learning, for example, but they do provide information on the "dimensions and dynamics of classroom living and learning" (p. 51). While Dyson is certainly in support of the value of case-study research, Yin (1994) noted that social scientists have stereotyped case study as "a weak sibling among social science methods" (p. xiii). Although he began his preface with this statement, his book presented an extended argument as to why this belief was wrong. The lack of status for case-study research was particularly evident after World War II when behaviorist psychology and large experimental studies were seen as the most rigorous form of research (Birnbaum, Emig, & Fisher, 2003). However, this lack of status is no longer documented and many researchers are using this design because they are dissatisfied with the limited answers they receive by studying percentages or stanines, particularly during the last 30 years (Birnbaum et al., 2003).

Clearly, case-study research is supported, maligned, and misunderstood (Merriam, 1988). While I have touched on its support and

criticism, I now consider the misunderstandings attached to it. One misunderstanding centers on seeing case-study research as synonymous with single-subject design (Neuman & McCormick, 2000). Although these two are often confused, single-subject design is experimental and considers the relationship between an independent and dependent variable—it is just focused on one individual at a time—and this is where the confusion is centered. A second misunderstanding is that case-study research is the same as the cases that are used to help students and teachers understand practice. For example, Shulman, Whittaker, and Lew (2002) presented problem-centered cases on assessment for educators to consider. These cases, while illustrative of dilemmas in practice, are narratives used to explore and reflect on practice, not research studies or reports. Their goal is to allow novices to critically analyze the dimensions built into a case that demonstrate the complexity of teaching, outside the classroom situation.

So what exactly is case-study research? Stake (2000) and Merriam (1988) indicate that this question is not easy to answer. They report that all social scientists and practitioners are engaged in case exploration, sometimes known as casework or case history, in that they observe as a doctor does a patient or a reporter an event. However, case study, as described by Merriam (1988), is a research design that is descriptive and nonexperimental. A critical characteristic of case-study research is that it is a study of a bounded system that could be a child, a teacher, or a classroom, for example (Stake, 2000). Boundedness is important for it defines what is excluded or included in a study. For example, one first-grade classroom may be the focus of study and, therefore, the teacher and students in the neighboring first-grade classroom would not be considered participants.

Merriam (1988) further defines four additional characteristics, beyond the issue of boundedness, that are essential when defining this research design: (1) *particularistic* in that the study is centered on a particular situation, program, event, phenomenon, or person; (2) *descriptive* in that the researcher gathers rich description of the object of study; (3) *heuristic* as the study enriches a reader's understanding and (4) *inductive* as the data drive the understandings that emerge from the study. In summary, case study is defined as "an intensive holistic description and analysis of a single entity, phenomenon, or social unit" (Merriam, 1988, p. 16).

Beyond the definition of a case study, Stake (2000) describes three types of case-study research. While the focus of study is not changed based on type, the purpose of the case varies within each one. In his first type, *intrinsic*, the researcher is seeking a better

...ding of a case—that is, he or she is exploring the case because ...teresting, not because it might contribute to theory building. ...emplar of this type of case study within literacy research is ...nstrated in the work of Sarroub (2002). In this study, she ex...d the multiple uses of religious and secular text in the school, ...e, and community of Yemeni high school girls. Her goal was to ...ribe their uses of literacy in multiple settings, not to build a the... around them.

Stake's second type of case study is called *instrumental*. Here the ...searcher is looking for insight into an issue. Stake says that in this ...pe, the case moves to the background of interest, for it is being ...sed to understand something else. An exemplar of this type is seen ...the work of Rogers (2002). Her focus of study was an African American mother and daughter who lived in poverty and were able to successfully negotiate the literacy expectations in their home and community, although not in school. She used her study of these two individuals to explain why children from nonmainstream homes may fail to thrive in school.

The last type of case-study research is *collective case study*, or multiple case studies, where a researcher investigates numerous cases to study a phenomenon, group, condition, or event. Stake emphasizes that this type is a refinement of instrumental case study; the only difference is that the researcher is studying multiple cases. The redundancy of cases is purposeful as the researcher is building a stronger understanding and a more compelling argument for the significance of the work through the use of multiple cases. Exemplars of this type of research are seen in the work of Ladson-Billings (1994), where she studied multiple teachers and the way they supported the learning of African American students, and in Barone's research (1999) where she explored the literacy development of children who were prenatally exposed to crack cocaine. In both studies, the patterns that were observed were seen across multiple cases and in multiple settings, thus establishing additional credibility for the results.

Wolcott (1994) has criticized the third type of case study, collective case study. He compared multiple case studies with an attempt to replicate quantitative, comparative measures, and he felt that much is lost in the rich detail of the study because it is focused on comparison rather than meticulous description. Miles and Huberman (1994), on the other hand, argue that the results of multiple case studies are more compelling than single cases and contribute to literal replication (i.e., prediction of similar results). So clearly, with the multiple-case-study design, there are trade-offs that need to be considered. Certainly, as Wolcott warned, there is a loss of detail

for each case, but as Miles and Huberman noted, multiple cases are often viewed as more compelling than single-case studies.

THE HISTORY OF CASE-STUDY RESEARCH IN LITERACY

Case study has a rich history in literacy research. As a way of narrowing this review I selected case studies that are book length rather than include the numerous case studies published in journals. Lea McGee and I explored book-length cases for a presentation at the National Reading Conference in 2000 and I drew from this exploration for this overview of case-study research in literacy. The majority of the studies selected focus on early literacy learning and instruction. This does not suggest that there are not other worthy case studies representing other populations; the narrow selection was meant as a way to bound the studies selected for this chapter.

The data collection for these studies varied from retrospective parent diaries to multiple sources such as observations, interviews, and artifacts. The participants also varied in that many were single-participant studies, often the researcher's child or grandchild, to studies of classrooms of students. In the majority of studies that are reported in this chapter, the researchers had an instrumental focus for their study. In other words, the case participants were selected to gain an understanding of a literacy practice, for example.

Earliest Case Studies

White (1956) wrote one of the first, book-length case studies that focused on literacy. She was a children's librarian in New Zealand and kept a retrospective parent diary of Carol's, her daughter's, interactions with books from when she was 2 years old until she was 5. Within this book, White established the precursors for response to literature research. She described her daughter's life-to-text and text-to-life experiences that were shared through reading. For example, Carol enjoyed books about babies when she had a baby sister. White commented about the significance of her descriptive work when she wrote:

> We see indeed, a twofold process at work: in some degree Carol's way of life determines the meaning she sees in the stories read to her; yet, on the other hand (and this is perhaps the more obvious), the meaning of things as it has been revealed to her through literature constantly influences the way she interprets the things that

> happen around her. Seldom, I think, has the interaction of literature and life in these early years been so clearly portrayed. (pp. x–xi)

In 1975, Butler, in *Cushla and Her Books*, studied her granddaughter's interaction with books. Although there are clear similarities with the work of White, this study was a dissertation study under the guidance of Marie Clay and it focused on a child who was severely handicapped, not a *precocious* child as White described her daughter. What is particularly amazing about her work is that she connected her work to Vygotsky (1962) and highlighted the importance of social factors in a child's development. She wrote, "the effects of the particular environment to which the child is exposed—exercise some effect on the rate at which he will pass through all the essential stages, from birth onwards" (p. 90). Her work is certainly one of the first in literacy that recognized the importance of the social environment to a child's literacy development.

These early case studies focused on literature and its importance to young readers. Both researchers engaged in retrospective note taking following book-reading episodes. They looked closely at how a daughter and granddaughter made connections between books and personal experiences. And Butler set the groundwork for further exploration of the importance of social settings in the learning of young children.

The 1980s and Case-Study Research

From these early beginnings, case studies were established in the literacy community to study the reading to and interactions of young children to text. During the 1980s, case-study research took on new importance because of the work of Bissex (1980), Calkins (1983), Heath (1983), Cochran-Smith (1984), Baghban (1984), and Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988), among others. These researchers laid the groundwork for research that continues to be explored into the 2000s.

Bissex (1980), in another dissertation study, studied the writing of her son David. Through this work, she helped literacy teachers and researchers understand how David learned to represent words and ideas in print. However, Bissex highlighted additional reasons as to why this study was important. Although her work is not often credited for an understanding of phonemic awareness, she wrote, "The superiority of first graders on segmentation tasks may result from their experience with the printed word" (p. 90). Her observa-

tion certainly connects with what is currently known about phonemic awareness (Ehri et al., 2001).

Bissex (1980) also spoke to the importance of case-study research. She wrote: "Case studies widen the parameters within which we view learning to read. They remind us that the methods and time schedules by which these skills are conventionally taught are not necessarily conditions for learning them" (p. 135).

This result, Bissex stated, could only be learned through careful, longitudinal case-study research. Moreover, her case study emphasized the dynamic nature of a child's learning about written language. She critiqued the notion of children accumulating discrete bits of information about written language and stated that children "evolve increasingly efficient—that is, comprehensive, informed, and practiced—strategies for understanding the relations between spoken and written language" (p. 194). And although not the remembered focus of her book, she continued in the tradition of White and Butler and shared the connections that David made between reading and writing.

Bissex's work led to numerous studies about invented spelling and error analysis. Most notable among this work are the studies that have been conducted by Henderson (1981) and his students, known as the Virginia studies, and Ehri (1997).

Shortly after Bissex's work, Calkins's (1983) *Lessons from a Child: On Teaching and Learning of Writing* was published. This work centered on the writing process and included consideration of topic choice, routines, revision and editing, and conferencing. Calkins used Susie, a student in a classroom where she observed, to present a vivid image of what revision could be for young students. Calkins's work departed from earlier case studies in two very important ways. While she studied one child, Susie, this was not her child or her grandchild. In addition, she studied Susie in her school setting and included the importance of her classroom teacher. While Butler talked about the importance of the social environment in the home, Calkins moved this importance to the classroom setting and detailed how one teacher supported the writing development of students, most particularly Susie, in her room.

As did Bissex, Calkins (1983) highlighted the importance of case-study research. She wrote:

> My hope is that through closely observing one child's growth in writing, we'll learn to watch for and to respect each child's growth in writing. My hope is that by understanding the pathways one child has taken in learning to write, we may be able to discern and

> trust the pathways other children will take. Susie is representative of all children in that she, too, is unique. (p. 7)

Calkins (1983) continued by saying that "all our students are case studies" (p. 7).

Furthermore, Calkins bravely announced that this was "the first study of its kind" (p. 5). This was so because she shared a day-to-day view of how a child experienced writing and revision. This was unlike previous work for she did not divide Susie's work into discrete categories or levels. Throughout her book, Calkins used the thoughts of Vygotsky (1962) to explain her results, as did Butler much earlier. She highlighted the idea of instruction preceding development and the idea of the zone of proximal development to shed light on the importance of peer work and teacher conferencing with individual students.

Perhaps, one of the best-known case studies is *Ways with Words: Language, Life, and Work in Communities and Classrooms* by Heath (1983). This work crosses over and is also considered ethnography as it was conducted over 10 years and looked at the home, community, and school. While not spending a lot of time on this study in this chapter, it is important to include it for it identified the importance of family to literacy understandings and the importance of the kind of talk and stories that were shared in homes and how they related to children's success in schools.

Heath's work departed from the traditions of earlier case-study research as she studied many children and families that were not considered middle class. She included their community, home, and school experiences and enriched the more limited earlier studies that only considered children in one setting (importantly, Bissex studied her son in school and home settings). In her work, as described earlier by Wolcott (1994), the uniqueness of each study is secondary to the comparisons that she provided that considered three communities as the focus. However, as can be seen by the importance of her work into the 2000s, this limitation did not impact the importance of her work to understandings of literacy as being broader than in-class instruction.

Using a similar design focus, Cochran-Smith (1984) studied all the middle-class children in one preschool classroom to learn about the importance of storybook reading. Her study is considered instrumental and the students are secondary to the knowledge that she wanted to acquire about this strategy. In her 18-month-long investigation, she discovered that there were two important rules about the

story-reading process: (1) a reader must read differentially depending on the audience, genre, purpose, and setting; and (2) "readers themselves contribute actively to the reading process by bringing their individual knowledge to bear upon texts (hence one book can have many realizations)" (p. 235). Perhaps, most surprising to me when reading her book were her descriptions of children talking about Superheroes such as Batman and Spiderman, or the popular culture. Her work predates the work of Dyson (1997) by 10 years or more, and certainly other researchers currently looking at this phenomenon (Alvermann, Huddleston, & Hagood, 2002; Xu, 2002).

Like White and Butler, Baghban (1984) returned to a view of her own daughter as she learned to read and write by keeping a diary centered on this development. Her study investigated this development from birth to 3 years of age and was a doctoral study similar to that done by Bissex. Her work, as has others, detailed the importance of social aspects in learning to read and write. Beyond this focus, she identified her daughter's connections with environmental print. She described how her daughter, Giti, pointed at the *K* in Special K cereal, and said "K-Mart." Baghban also identified drawing as the fifth language art. She compared writing and drawing by noting that both required motor control, were based on experiences, and moved from more contextualized experiences to decontextualized ones as the symbol systems became internalized.

Perhaps, most interesting in this work to the focus of this chapter is her rationale for using case study. She contends that case study is the best method to use when learning about individuals and it is particularly effective when studying complex phenomena in real-life situations. Further, to support her use of case study she noted that in the latest *Annual Summary of Investigations Relating to Reading, July 1, 1979 to June 30, 1980,* Weintraub (1981) claimed that because there have been so many investigations into single cases that this type of study was "no longer suspect or even unusual" (p. 7). She also extensively discussed the limited generalizability of case-study research, but then she presented conflicting thoughts when she said "with a sufficient number of such long-term case studies, generalizations have the opportunity to be validated" (p. 7). It appeared that she was arguing that with many case studies focused on the same topic, generalizations centered on the findings would be appropriate.

The last case-study research to be reported that was conducted in the 1980s is the work of Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988). They, as had Heath, moved to studying low-income families when they selected black, urban families as the focus of their research. While Heath explored why low-income children had difficulty in school,

Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines turned this view inside out as they wanted to know why black, urban, poor children were doing well in first grade. They discovered that these children bridged their home literacy to school, their families supported literacy in home and in school, and their families wanted and supported their children in becoming "independent survivors in a sometimes hostile world" (p. 209).

Moreover, while Bissex was merely displeased with much of the schooling her son received, Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines were extremely critical of the instruction they observed. They wrote:

> Literacy cannot be quantified in numbers, nor is it directly related to the frequency of use. It cannot be taught through a decoding process, nor through a series of disconnected (if well ordered) exercises. We can pull language apart, but we cannot expect children to do the same. Children need to be able to create public and private text worlds with continual opportunities to use their expressive abilities to generate new meanings and maintain personal and shared interpretations of the social, technical, and aesthetic types and uses of literacy. It would be hard to dispute the assertion that, in most of our schools, few such opportunities currently exist. (p. 201)

Their argument continued as they noted that schools did not recognize the lives of students or their complex social and cognitive abilities. Schools preferred to assign exercises and tests that were not relevant to the lives of students and, perhaps more important, were limited to low-level skills. Similar arguments are seen in current research, particularly that of Kris Gutierrez (Gutierrez et al., 2002).

During the 1980s, case-study research became increasingly important to literacy researchers, and as Baghban wrote, they were "no longer suspect or unusual" (p. 7). These researchers explored writing, invented spelling, storybook reading, successful minority students, and the connections between home and school. They moved from considering their own children to larger groups of children who were frequently not considered mainstream. And as seen in the work of Bissex and Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines, a critical perspective on schools was evident.

Case-Study Research in the 1990s

In the 1990s, case-study research extended from its traditions as seen in the work of Schickendanz, Wolf and Heath, Rowe, Purcell-Gates, Martens, Dyson, Ballenger, and Barone. Their work was similar in

some ways as several of these researchers explored the development of their own children (Schickendanz, Wolf and Heath, Martens, and Rowe); however, the research questions became more complex and children representing diverse backgrounds most often became the focus of study. These researchers studied writing, reading and response to literature, and diversity.

Schickendanz (1990) conducted a retrospective study centered on her son, Adam, where she wanted to learn how he came to understand how words are constructed. In much of her work, you can hear the voice of her son as he explained what he did on assignments and writing that she had saved. Adam's writing understandings began with connections between the physical relationship of things and their representation. Through extended exploration, Adam learned how to use letters to represent sounds in words "making more starts and stops, and then, finally set out a spurt of independent, phonemic-based writing" (p. 31). Schickendanz demonstrated how complicated the process of learning to represent words is when she stated, "I suspect that Adam—and other children—require considerable knowledge about phonemic segmentation and letter-sound correspondences before they can take off on their own and create spelling" (p. 27).

Shickendanz is a careful observer and her book is filled with fine-grained analysis of her son's writing. And though she has many insights about the development of writing for teachers and researchers, I found one finding of hers to be particularly important. She wrote, "Inventive spellers are not taking risks; they think they are spelling words right. The reluctant child knows more and digs in his heels" (p. 104). This finding explains why some children in school refuse to use their best efforts to spell a word; they know it has one single representation and they want to replicate that. They are dissatisfied when their teachers say just write it as best you can.

Continuing in the tradition of studying one's own child, Wolf and Heath (1992) detail and explain the responses to books that Wolf's two daughters produced. This work is reminiscent of the observations made by White and Butler. Within the two cases, those of Lindsey and Ashley, shared in this book, a reader learns about connections from life to literature and literature to life. For example, the girls scrub the floor as the children did in the *Little House* books or they explain that they are not the evil stepsister from Cinderella. Wolf and Heath highlight the difference between the act of reading and the experience of reading. In all the examples shared in the book, the reader understands how the girls brought the experiences that were read about in books to create meaning in their day-to-day expe-

riences. They wrote about these important experiences: "Literacy is not acquired in a vacuum. Nor does it spring fully formed from our minds, like Athena from the head of Zeus. It is an evolutionary process changing from generation to generation and from life to life" (p. 24).

Within the rich descriptions, they note that Ashley preferred nonfiction text and that even in this rich, home literacy background, Lindsey had difficulty learning to decode text in first grade. Beyond these discoveries, they detail how the girls used the rich vocabulary from books. For example, Lindsey asked, "Is a bier like a grave?" after reading *Sleeping Beauty*. This discussion of vocabulary learned in text is similar to the current work being done by Beck (2002) where the importance of vocabulary for reading development and comprehension is addressed.

As with other cases already shared, Wolf and Heath (1992) compared the learning that the girls experienced at home and how they had to adapt this learning in school situations. They wrote:

> The comparatively stripped-down life of opportunities for extended discussion, and the emphasis on facts rather than interpretation bear little resemblance to what the girls knew to be reading-to-learn at home. To be successful in school, they would need to adapt their abilities to the tasks of schooling and limit their understandings to finding the prescribed answers to the relatively simple stories of basal readers and other textbooks in the classroom. (p. 191)

Wolf and Heath continued the criticism of schools in that they saw teachers asking low-level, constrained questions that took children away from real experiences with literature.

Moving away from home settings, Rowe (1994) explored the literacy learning of 21 students in a middle-class preschool. Her study is similar to Cochran-Smith's in that she was more interested in learning about the children's perspectives in general, rather than highlighting the children as individuals. Her work saw literacy as something that is "not mastered once and for all time" (p. 3). Rather, this process evolves as a child interprets the semiotic potential within text. Rowe contended that because children's perspectives and knowledge of the social world are different from those of adults, a researcher and teacher must come to understand the child's perspectives of literacy activities.

Her careful analysis is similar to Schickendanz's and she included discourse analysis as well. Through this analysis that occurred while children wrote, she discovered that "literacy activities became

embedded in peer culture" (p. 119). Her work is very similar to the research done by Dyson (1997) in that she highlighted the importance of peers in literacy development.

In a departure from studying one's own children or children in middle-class preschools, Purcell-Gates (1995) engaged in inquiry centered on Donny and Jenny, a mother and son with Appalachian roots. Unlike the work of Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988), she wanted to understand why this child struggled in school. And unlike earlier work, Purcell-Gates took on a critical stance when she tutored Donny and helped his mother negotiate school.

There were many interesting results to this study. First, she concluded that phonics instruction needs to be responsive to a child's knowledge. Further, she said that "new skills and strategies are learned mainly through the process of reading itself" (p. 79). Second, while Jenny wanted to and tried to help Donny with his homework, she was not able to do so. However, the school just saw Donny as lazy for he did not complete his homework. The onus for homework was totally placed with the parent and child. And third, the school used Donny's literacy struggles as further evidence that "Appalachian parents are irresponsible and uncaring about their children's education" (p. 161). While the deficit view is noted in other works, Purcell-Gates provided careful description in how this view develops when schools do not consider the needs and strengths of the families they serve.

In 1996, Martens engaged in a 3-year case study that centered on her adopted daughter, Sarah. She wanted to discover how a child viewed learning to read and write, a view that was used in the work of Schickendanz. Martens's book is filled with carefully described home events that contributed to Sarah's literacy understandings. Although there are numerous examples throughout, she highlights the importance of learning to write one's own name and acquiring the alphabetic principle to literacy development. Through these understandings, her daughter could now share her writing with others and they could gain the meaning conveyed in her messages. Sarah's story concludes with her kindergarten year where her teacher's view of literacy learning and instruction did not match home. Martens offers suggestions for early literacy teachers in which they are encouraged to observe children and teach based on these observations. What I found interesting in this case is that the mismatch between home and school literacy knowledge is most often noted for children who are from high-poverty backgrounds. In this book, a similar mismatch is observed for a child from a middle-class background, thus making the complexity of teaching literacy to young children even greater.

The next three cases (Dyson, Ballenger, and Barone) move away from consideration of one's own child or only one child. These studies consider high-poverty, language-rich children in the complexity of their classrooms.

Dyson (1997) studied second and third graders over 2 years as part of her research program that considers how children learn to write. In this study, she concentrated on how young children use Superhero stories "to feel powerful in a (pretend) danger-filled world" (p. 14). Her book is filled with events where children dealt with issues of power, romance, gender, and race in writing, the theatre enactments of their writing, and in their official and unofficial talk.

Dyson's work is powerful in that she argues for parents, teachers, and administrators to be sensitive to the "ideological as well as the social dimensions of literacy" (p. 184). She carefully crafts vignettes so that readers understand the importance of building on and responding to what children know and can do alone and with others. Her work highlights the importance of popular culture to children's personal and academic development.

Ballenger's work (1999) considered young, 3- and 4-year-old, Haitian children. In this study she was both teacher and researcher. She shared that when she first worked with these children she engaged in deficit thinking and considered them to be deficient. Throughout her book, she reflected on how she moved from this view to one where she considered each child's strengths. In her study, it was possible to see the tensions of a teacher as she tried to bring her students to middle-class understandings of book reading. Her study, unlike Dyson's with a focus on students, was concerned with the teacher's dilemmas in teaching to this group of students.

In much of her study, she discussed how she tried to make up for the lack of storybook reading that occurred in the home by reading numerous books to her students in the classroom. She shared her frustrations when children considered catalogues to be on an equal par with books. She concluded "providing storybook reading experience does not create a child who has a mainstream understanding of books" (p. 78). Rather, she believed, "storybook reading was not the same activity in this class as the one described in the literature" (p. 79). She contended that she had to understand her students' interpretations of book reading, which included not understanding that books represented stories and that they could talk throughout a book reading, before she could let them come to know her understandings. Her work extended the work of White, Butler, and Wolf and Heath in that she identified how off-topic comments may in fact help children make connections within text and between texts.

Finally, Barone's study (1999) explored the literacy development of 26 children prenatally exposed to crack cocaine. In her work, she described the children both at home and at school as she tried to understand how each child developed as a reader and writer. Her work demonstrated that children with this prenatal history could be successful in learning to read and write in their mainstream classrooms. Her work also highlighted the importance of the teacher in each child's success. And similar to Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988), she found

> sharp contrasts between the classrooms of the children in schools for middle-class and poor children. I also discovered that children of color who attended middle-class schools could be the victims of discrimination. I found that what I thought were universally endorsed practices for children's literacy development were used infrequently in primary classrooms. I found that parents supported their child's learning but often were distanced from their child's teachers. I found that teachers were often unaware of the home circumstances of the children they taught. (p. 10)

The results of this study that was conducted in numerous schools and homes over 4 years, not just one classroom or home, are reminiscent of many of the case studies reported. Schools were found to not be particularly supportive of children, especially high-poverty children. The curriculum was often skills based and deficit oriented, rather than meaning based and difference oriented. Teachers did not understand the uniqueness of the children they taught and taught to the class, rather than individuals. Literacy developed in social contexts where children could talk to each other and the teacher, although these contexts were not always encouraged by teachers. Teachers were critical to each child's literacy learning—they were more important than the curricula they enacted.

Each of the cases shared provides a deeper understanding into how children develop into readers and writers. They enhance and provide rich descriptions into how this process happens. They also, as seen in the work of Bissex, provide roadmaps for the quantitative research that followed. By exploring case studies, a picture of children's learning is shared as well as the dilemmas of teaching culturally and language-rich children as particularly seen in the work of Ballenger.

The case studies that have been conducted in the 1990s are more complex than those done earlier. Like earlier studies, they considered writing, reading and response, and reading and writing development. However, they have moved from a consideration of one child, often a family member, to many children in school and home settings. And these children most often represent cultures and have

home languages not considered mainstream. These cases have as their goal an understanding of home literacy practices and school literacy practices so that all children have the opportunity of developing into successful readers and writers.

In this section, the results of each study have been the focus, rather than the specific details of how the researchers structured their case studies. The exemplar studies were chosen because the researchers engaged in rigorous data collection and analysis that most often included multiple observations, interviews, and artifacts. Rather than repeatedly sharing these details, I chose to highlight the importance of their work to the literacy community. Through this foregrounding of results, the importance of case-study research to the knowledge base of literacy learning and instruction is clearly documented.

FOR WHAT KINDS OF QUESTIONS AND CLAIMS IS THIS METHODOLOGY APPROPRIATE?

Case-study research generally answers one or more questions that begin with *how* or *why* (Yin, 1994). Stake (1995) recommends that the researcher write out 10 to 20 prospective questions. From this initial list, the researcher narrows to two or three questions that guide the data collection and analysis.

Another strategy is to start with one broad question and as the study progresses other questions emerge which provide more focus. Barone (1999) did this in her study where she began with one broad question: How do children prenatally exposed to crack cocaine develop as readers and writers? During the second year of her study, she added a second question that included the classroom contexts that were established by teachers. She found that just looking at children was not sufficient as some teachers did not create learning environments that supported children's literacy learning. By just saying that a child did not enhance his or her understandings of literacy during a year presented a limited view, one that only considered the child.

McCarthey (1998) used yet another strategy when she started with one question and then used multiple lenses to explore it. She found that by using different lenses, different interpretations of the data were possible, each enriching the other. For example, if a child's identity was considered shy by the teacher, this interpretation of the child's identity was preferred. However, when this child was observed to be the leader in small-group interaction, this identity needed to be reconceptualized. Similarly, Hargreaves, Earl, and Schmidt (2002) studied alternative assessment reform from four perspectives that included technological, cultural, political, and postmodern. Thus, they

gained a richer understanding of the phenomenon that could not be garnered from the use of one interpretation.

While finding the appropriate question for case study is important, it is also necessary to know when to use a case-study design. Yin (1994) described a common misconception regarding case study. He said that at one time case studies were only seen as appropriate for exploratory studies. However, today, case studies, he argues, can be used for description and explanation as well as exploration. Importantly, case studies are most often used when the researcher has no control over the behaviors that are being studied (e.g., in Dyson's study where she was investigating the writing behaviors of young students). It is misleading to believe, however, that case study can only be used to observe behavior. When a researcher assumes a critical stance, as seen in the work of Ballenger, he or she can use what is discovered during research study to improve the conditions for learning and therefore change the environment that is being investigated while the study is occurring.

Once the questions and purpose for the study are established, the researcher needs to select participants, or the unit or units for analysis. Patton (1990) discusses the need for purposeful sampling in case-study research. He recommends the selection of "information-rich cases" (p. 169). These are cases in which the researcher can learn a great deal and thoughtfully answer the question or questions posed. Yin (1994) describes the basic designs or reasons for case-study research. These include:

Single-case research

- To test a theory (single case can be used to determine if the propositions of the theory are correct)
- An extreme or unique case (often used in clinical psychology)
- Revelatory case (analyze a phenomenon previously unavailable to researchers)

Multiple-case research

- Used to predict similar results (literal replication)
- Used to produce contrasting results for predictable reasons (theoretical replication)

Simultaneously with the development of questions, purpose, and sampling, the researcher is expected to develop a rigorous design for the case study. This part includes data collection and analysis, as well as time in the field.

WHAT ARE STANDARDS FOR QUALITY IN THIS METHODOLOGY?

Yin (1994) described several ways to determine the quality of case study. First is the use multiple sources of evidence. These might include multiple observations, interviews, and the collection of artifacts and documents. By using multiple data sources, the researcher can discover "a converging line of inquiry" (p. 92). As a result, the researcher has built a compelling case for his or her results and conclusions. Second, Yin argues for the creation of a chain of evidence. Here the researcher presents in his or her case the evidence in a linear fashion and how it contributed to the conclusions reached. In this way the reader can follow the path of data collection and analysis with the researcher. Third, the case study is reviewed by the key informant(s) before it appears in print. Through this process, the researcher is asking the key informant to correct any misconceptions that may have found their way into the report.

In addition to the strategies noted by Yin, credibility for a case study comes from length of time in the field (Merriam, 1988). Through extended time in the field, the researcher guarantees that what has been witnessed represents a pattern, rather than an aberration. Finally, the researcher needs to carefully consider ethical issues that include any biases that may be personally held and report these to the reader as well as the remedies the researcher took to hold bias in check through the interpretation of the data. Beyond personal bias, other ethical issues are relevant to case-study research. These include the researcher becoming involved with persons, issues, or events under study, maintaining confidentiality, ownership of the data, and problems with the inability to distinguish data from the researcher's interpretations (Merriam, 1988).

WHAT IS ONE OR MORE EXEMPLAR OF THIS METHODOLOGY AND WHAT MAKES IT SO GOOD?

While there are many exemplars of this methodology in literacy research, I have chosen *Reading Families: The Literate Lives of Urban Children* by Catherine Compton-Lilly (2003) as a model. Her book represents her dissertation work that focused on parents and students and the importance of reading and how these families enacted reading in their homes. Her goal was to learn from her students and their families and to challenge the prevailing deficit views of urban families. Her work is similar to that of Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988).

Her study design is a year-long multiple case study with an instrumental purpose in that she is using her 10 parent–child dyads, randomly selected, to understand literacy. In her book she shares the results of her 10 case studies and then uses one chapter to look closely at one family, that of Mrs. Holt, so that readers understand the way Bradford's (her son) "reading experiences are conceptualized within discourse communities that operate in his home, at school, and within the larger community" (p. 124).

Within her book, she uses one chapter to carefully lay out the methodology that she used for her study. Unlike most examples, she spends considerable time describing her analysis of the data. In this description she explains how she used critical discourse analysis to help her see "contradictions between various ideological positions and power struggles that permeated the lives of teachers, students, and parents" (p. 41). Her other chapters are organized along the central themes of her findings: the role of reading in the lives of students and families, parents' and teachers' roles in helping children learn to read, the role of social relationships in learning to read, construction of urban reading identities, and contradictions and complexities. Within the contradictions and complexities chapter, she shares the contradictions that appeared in the discourse of her participants. Through this chapter and others, she is careful not to present a singular conclusion but deals with the complexity of her results.

So why is this study good? First, Compton-Lilly uses multiple sources of data (Yin, 1994). She had multiple student and parent interviews that occurred over time. She used classroom data that included class discussion audiotapes, guided reading group audiotapes, student-written documents, student portfolios, and journals. Finally, she kept daily field notes that most often reflected political disputes centered on curriculum. She shared her tentative findings with parents throughout her study thereby creating a chain of evidence. By sharing her work repeatedly with parents, she had confidence that she was creating an accurate report.

Moreover, she worked with her parents throughout an entire year, so she had sufficient time in the field to know that she was recording patterns of behavior rather than a one-time event. Compton-Lilly also did not shy away from talking about her biases and how they may have affected her results. She served as teacher of her students as she conducted research with them. She described this role as one of an insider, but she coupled this with being an outsider when she was in the homes of her students. She then reflected on the tensions that she felt when she developed curricula for her students as she did not want to dismiss the voices and values of her students and

their families. Following this discussion, she alerted the reader to the fact that she is white and studying African American and Puerto Rican children and their families. In this discussion, she shared how hard it was to not blame families for the difficulties that students had in becoming literate. As she tried to withhold judgment about families, she was inundated with teachers who blamed parents. She wrote "arguments that blame parents can be very convincing and reassuring to a teacher concerned about efficacy; moreover, claims made in defense of parents are difficult to substantiate and sustain" (p. 43). In addition, Compton-Lilly did not try to simplify the complexity and contradictions she found in her research, particularly in her discourse analysis. She discovered ways to share this complexity and to make her study more compelling in the process. Clearly, Compton-Lilly met the criteria that make for a quality case study.

FINAL WORDS

As was evident in the overviews of case studies presented throughout this chapter, case-study research is important to our understandings of literacy. Case studies are complex because they are built around multiple data sources that must be analyzed into themes or patterns. This is no easy task as rigorous case study results in significant amounts of data that are often difficult to reconcile. However, for those who engage in this form of research, the rewards are many. Perhaps most important is this work is applicable to real life as it relates directly to the reader's experiences and facilitates understanding of complex situations, understandings that cannot be made explicit in most other research designs.

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